

## The Importance of Email Punctuation: A Cautionary Tale

*Though in his essay he treats e-mail with some humour, J. Kelly Nestruck is also very serious about it. "Anyone who wants to be a writer or improve his or her writing should write a lot of email," he advises, because "the more one writes the better one becomes at writing." He adds that "the Internet has totally altered what it means to be a writer, as well. It is a great place to be published for the first time, whether in an ezine, on a message board, or on your own personal web page." It was in a campus newspaper, though, The McGill Daily, that in 1999 the first-year McGill University arts student published his "cautionary tale." Majoring in English (drama and theatre) and in history, Nestruck plans to go on to a masters in journalism and work in that field. He has already published in Agent Magazine and The McGill Tribune. He has been culture editor and commentary editor at The McGill Daily, Quebec Bureau Chief for Canadian University Press, and a contributing editor of an e-zine, plasticbenjamin.com. Nestruck also loves theatre, having performed in a musical version of Plato's Symposium at the Montreal Fringe Festival, and collaborated on an unauthorized musical version of Conrad Black's autobiography. Born in Winnipeg, Nestruck has spent most of his life in Montreal, where at the time this book went to press he was in fourth year at McGill.*

Never before in my life had I considered a colon so carefully. I spent a full 20 minutes staring at it at the very top of the message. Kelly, colon. It was perhaps the first time I had thought about the affective meaning of punctuation, particularly in email. Linguists have become increasingly interested in communication through email. This abbreviated, instant form of discourse has revolutionised the world. Even though I have only been using email for six or seven years, I can no longer imagine life without it. Classes now have discussion listservs. I can email an article minutes before a deadline from across the city. The relationship with my father in Winnipeg has become more personal than it had been with the alternating Saturday father-son telephone call. Because of its brief nature every single character in an email takes on enormous significance. This includes the colon that I found preceded by my name at the top of the email.

Previous emails from this person had begun with Kelly followed by a resounding exclamation point. My, how I savoured those exclamation points, each one echoing throughout my entire body. This correspondent of mine, whose slender fingers I imagine even now gently depress-

ing the Shift key and then caressing the 1, is not one of those who overuses the exclamation point. She is not like others in my database who write valley girl messages littered with similes like, "Kelly! I just got a new garbage can! It has a pedal you push to make the lid go up!:) I'm going to Peel Pub later! TTFN!"<sup>o</sup>

Likewise, my slender-fingered email friend never adopted the punctuation of fakes, phoneys, and ostentatious schmucks: the semi-colon. The semi-colon, while popular outside of the cyberworld, should be relegated to formal modes of communication. A semi-colon in an email ("We should meet at Peel Pub; it is finally wet T-shirt night again.") is as out of place as an exclamation point in an essay ("The Miskitu Indians were subordinate to both the Nicaraguan state and the institution of American neo-colonialism!").

Occasionally, when my delicately digitized correspondent's heart was heavy with some crisis or another, the exclamation point would disappear after my name. Short messages sometimes had my name followed by a comma. None of this bothered me. The colon however, shattered me. Colons are the punctuation of lawyers, bankers and junk emailers trying to get me to take out a \$50,000 loan over the net. How cold and antiseptic that colon was. Two little bulletholes through my heart.

Then, later in the message, came the ellipsis. There is a world of difference between "We should get together to talk about stuff" period and "We need to get together to talk about stuff" period, period, period. I expected the ellipsis from the colon on down. The cautionary colon foreshadowed what was to come.

And now our relationship is in parentheses, as I await the anticipated appointment to talk about stuff, period, period, period. In person, the only commas will be drawn nervously in the air with her aforementioned slender fingers. The only dashes will be in her stilted, anxious speech. The only periods will be her small, black, intense pupils submerged in her beautiful green eyes, darting away from mine. And as she recedes into the distance, I will be left standing there like an ellipsis.

Two little bulletholes through my heart.

### Explorations:

Ronald Conrad, *Process and Practice* (see coverage of punctuation marks)  
<http://www.webfoot.com/advice/email.top.html> (full and sensible advice on all main aspects of writing e-mail messages)  
<http://www.stevgrossman.com/jargpge.htm>  
[http://everythingemail.net/email\\_help\\_tips.html](http://everythingemail.net/email_help_tips.html)

<sup>o</sup> TTFN: "Ta Ta For Now," an expression now replaced, the author says, by TTYL ("Talk To You Later").

## Structure:

1. Did the beginning of this essay motivate you to read on? Why or why not? Point out every technique Nestruck uses in paragraphs 1 and 2 to gain your attention.
2. Identify Nestruck's THESIS STATEMENT.
3. To support his overall point that “. . . every single character in an email takes on enormous significance” (par. 2), Nestruck constructs his argument as a series of *examples* of e-mail punctuation. Identify each. Does every example further the point? Does his total of examples reach the recommended 50% of essay content?

## Style:

1. This essay contains three sentence fragments. Identify them. Why is one repeated? Are they errors or are they just part of the author's STYLE? How FORMAL or INFORMAL is that style? Does it fit his subject?
2. The relationship of our author and his green-eyed e-mail correspondent is now “in parentheses” (par. 7). Point out all his other METAPHORS involving punctuation marks. What TONE do they suggest? Is Nestruck having some laughs at the expense of his endangered romance? If so, why?

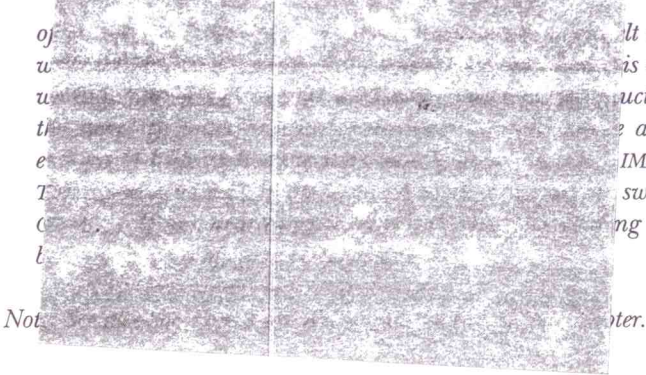
## Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Have you ever had an online romance? How did it turn out? Are there advantages? Pitfalls? Dangers? Give an *example*.
2. Nestruck calls the semicolon, at least as used in e-mails, “the punctuation of fakes, phoneys, and ostentatious schmucks.” Has he gone too far, or do you agree? Tell why. Do you use it in essays? In e-mails? Or do you avoid it? Why? And can you explain how it is correctly used in a sentence?
3. In his argument Nestruck names the colon, exclamation point, semicolon, comma, ellipsis, parenthesis, comma, dash and period. Which of these punctuation marks do you like most? Why? Which do you like least? Why? Give an *example* of each used correctly in a sentence.
4. Has e-mail led you to communicate more often in writing? Does it make relating to people easier, as it does for Nestruck and his father in Winnipeg? On the other hand, does the speed of e-mail make you send messages you later wish you had not? Give an *example*.
5. Some office workers receive a hundred or more e-mails a day. How do they process so much communication? How many do you get? How long do you spend answering? Tell your best technique for saving time doing so. All in all, do you believe e-mail is saving your time or wasting it?

6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** We can't give out the author's e-mail address, for reasons of privacy. Besides, it would probably change by the time you read this book. But suppose you knew it. Compose a typical e-mail message, in your typical online style and with your usual online punctuation, advising Kelly Nestruck how to proceed when he and his green-eyed correspondent “get together to talk about stuff. . .”

Now look at what you have written for one medium, and rethink it for another: the ESSAY. Decide on a THESIS STATEMENT that expresses the overall focus of your advice. Then write the argument, building it on a series of examples from your own experience (try for the minimum 50% example content any good essay needs). The next day revise where needed. Make sure your punctuation is now standard for the essay. Then print. Bring both versions of your advice, and share them with your classmates.

*Note: See also the Topics for Discussion at the end of this chapter.*



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sweep us towards a  
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# GEORGE GABORI

## Coming of Age in Putnok

Translated from the Hungarian by Eric Johnson with George Faludy

*For much of his life George Gabori (1924-1997) drove taxi and ran a cab company in Toronto. Like many immigrants to this country, though, he had a past he would never forget. Gabori (pronounced Gábori) was born to a Jewish family in the village of Putnok, Hungary. His childhood was happy but short, for when the Germans overran Hungary and threatened the existence of the Jews, he joined the resistance. He led daring sabotage raids, blowing up German trains, till the Gestapo sent him, still a teenager, to a concentration camp. When later the Russians drove out the Germans, Gabori was as troublesome for the Communists as he had been for the Nazis: soon after his release from Dachau, he was breaking rocks in a notorious Soviet labour camp. Always outspoken in favour of democracy, Gabori played a part in the 1956 Revolution, then escaped from Hungary to Canada, a "decent land," where years later he wrote his memoirs in Hungarian. With the help of Hungarian poet George Faludy, Eric Johnson condensed and translated the enormous manuscript, and in 1981 it was published. Since then, When Evils Were Most Free has become a minor Canadian classic and has been translated into many other languages. Our selection is its opening passage.*

When I was nine years old my father, victorious after a long argument with my grandfather, took me out of our town's only cheder and enrolled me in its only public school. Overnight I was transported from the world of Hebrew letters and monotonously repeated texts to the still stranger world of Hungarian letters, patriotic slogans and walls covered with maps.

Grandfather rolled his eyes and predicted trouble, but it seemed he was wrong. I sat beside a boy my own age named Tivadar, a gentile — everybody was a gentile in that school except me. Tivadar and I got along famously until, after two or three weeks, he approached me in the schoolyard one day and asked me if it was true what the others were saying, that "we" had murdered Jesus.

Strange to tell — for this was 1933 and we were in Hungary — I had never heard about this historical episode, and I left Tivadar amicably enough, promising to ask my father about it. We met again the next morning and I told him what I had learned: that the Romans had killed Jesus, and that anyway Jesus had been a Jew, like me, so what did it matter to the Christians?

"That's not true," said Tivadar menacingly.

5 “My father does not lie,” I replied.  
6 By now a crowd had gathered around us and there was nothing for it  
but to fight it out. There were cheers and laughter as Tivadar hit me in  
the nose before I got my jacket off. It was not the first time I had tasted  
my own blood, but it was the first time a Christian had made it flow.  
Tivadar was flushed with pleasure and excitement at the applause and  
not at all expecting it when I lashed out with my fist and sent him  
sprawling backward on the cobbles. The crowd of boys groaned and  
shouted to Tivadar to get up and kill the Jew, but poor Tivadar did not  
move. Frightened, I grabbed my jacket and shoved my way through the  
crowd stunned into silence by this overturning of the laws of nature.  
7 They were silent at home too when I told them what had happened.  
My father sent for me from his office in the afternoon, and I entered  
cap in hand. He always wore a braided Slovak jacket at work and looked  
more like a peasant than a Jewish wine merchant.  
8 “Well, who started it?” asked my father, wearing an expression I had  
never seen on his face before. I was not at all frightened.  
9 “He did. I told him what you said about Jesus and he challenged me.”  
10 My father clamped his teeth on his cigar and nodded, looking right  
through me.  
11 “Jews don’t fight,” he finally said.  
12 “Then why did you put me in a Christian school?” I asked in a loud,  
outraged whine.  
13 “That’s why I put you there, my son,” he said at last, then swept me  
up and kissed me on the forehead. “You’re learning fast; only next time  
don’t hit him quite so hard.”  
14 Then he sent me out quickly and I stopped on the landing, startled to  
hear loud, whooping, solitary laughter coming out of my father’s office.

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**Explorations:**

George Gabori, *When Evils Were Most Free*  
George Faludy, *My Happy Days in Hell*  
Adam Horvath, “Lives Lived: George Gabori,” *Toronto Globe and Mail*,  
December 7, 1997  
Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank*  
Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*  
<http://www.holocaustcenter.org/lifechance/lit51.shtml>  
[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)  
<http://home.carolina.rr.com/wormold/hungary/history-11.htm>

**Structure:**

1. What overall pattern organizes this selection?

2. Point out at least ten words or phrases in this *narrative* that signal the flow of time.
3. Scrutinize Gabori’s opening paragraph: has he prepared us for the selection? Name every fact revealed about the setting and about the author.

**Style:**

1. How economical of words is this opening passage of Gabori’s life story? How clearly does it reveal the author and his times? Would you predict with any confidence his character or fate as an adult? Do these pages tempt you to read the whole book? Why or why not?
2. *When Evils Were Most Free* is translated and condensed from the Hungarian original. Does this act separate us from Gabori’s thoughts? How exact can translations be? If you are bilingual or multilingual, how precisely can you put sayings from one language into another? Can translator Eric Johnson even be seen as a co-author of these pages?
3. In paragraph 6 Gabori states, “It was not the first time I had tasted my own blood . . . .” What makes this image strong?

**Ideas for Discussion and Writing:**

1. What exactly is the “overturning of the laws of nature” at the end of paragraph 6?
2. Was Gabori’s father right to move the boy from a Hebrew *cheder* to a public school? In disproving the STEREOTYPE that “Jews don’t fight” (par. 11), has the boy learned a worthwhile lesson? Or does he merely copy the worst traits of his opponents, thereby becoming like them?
3. Every ethnic group in Canada — including English Canadians — is a minority. Has your minority been persecuted here? If you have been a victim, *narrate* an actual incident, including your own reaction. Like Gabori, give many specifics.
4. In taunting and hitting his Jewish classmate, Tivadar is a bully. How much bullying have you seen in your own school years? Visit the [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) Canadian Web site given above (described on the CBC’s *National* as one of the best Web sites in the world for children). Choose one of the many incidents described by victims. Summarize it to the class, then tell how you, yourself, would have reacted had you been the victim.
5. What are autobiographies for? What do you think writing your own life story would do for you? For others?
6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Write a chapter of your own autobiography. Select one key incident in your life, then freewrite on it for a few minutes.*

## Capping the Great Cup Debate

*Few scientists could be better equipped to investigate the subject of our selection than Martin Hocking. With a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of Southampton (1963), experience as a research chemist in industry, then extensive research and publication as a professor of chemistry at the University of Victoria, Hocking has become a prominent voice in his field. He has advised government on scientific issues; has taught industrial and environmental chemistry for many years; holds many patents in the fields of monomers, process chemistry and medicine; has over 70 scientific papers to his credit; and has published a major reference book: Handbook of Chemical Technology and Pollution Control (second edition, 1998). He also advises industry, for example on issues of water purification in coal mining, and on the generation of chlorinated organic compounds in the production of paper. It was his comparative analysis in the journal Science that in 1991 sparked debate on the environmental effects of paper cups and foam cups. Hocking concluded that, contrary to public opinion, foam was better. Some scientists questioned his emission figures and his view of paper mill energy use; others commended his open revealing of data sources, a practice not all scientists follow, and the relevance of his "cradle-to-grave" scope: from logging the raw resources to discarding the old cups in landfills. Then Hocking adapted his article for a general audience; on February 16, 1991 the Globe and Mail published this selection. In 2000 Hocking again made the news: circulation of fresh air is so slow in the new airliners, he announced in a report, that passengers risk exposure to colds, flu, measles, chicken pox and even tuberculosis. The air industry and the House of Lords reacted angrily, but on the BBC Hocking defended his findings with statistics.*

**T**he polystyrene foam cup has long suffered contempt from an environmentally aware public that assumes paper cups are ecologically friendlier. It's easy to understand why: paper cups are made out of a wood product, a renewable resource, and therefore would seem to be the proper conservationist choice.

In fact, foam cups are proving to be the environmentally better choice.

For one thing, people overlook the fact that logging necessary for the paper industry has adverse effects on the landscape that range from the construction of roads to clear-cutting practices that typically increase the likelihood of flood and drought in immediate watershed areas.

In addition, a review of other factors does not support the use of paper. A comparative analysis of paper versus polystyrene conducted by us at the University of Victoria leads to the inevitable conclusion that foam cups are better from a range of standpoints.

Here are the principal findings of the analysis:

### Hydrocarbons

The extraction and delivery of oil and gas hydrocarbons have a significant impact on sensitive ecosystems. A polyfoam cup is made entirely from hydrocarbons, but a similar amount of hydrocarbons are also used to produce a paper cup.

Paper cups are made from bleached pulp, which in turn is obtained from wood chips. Although bark, some wood waste, and organic residues from chemical pulping are burned to supply part of the energy required in papermaking, fuel oil or gas is used to provide much of the rest. Even more petroleum is needed if the paper cup has a plastic or wax coating.

### Inorganic chemicals

In the making of paper cups, relatively small amounts of sodium hydroxide or sodium sulphate are needed for chemical pulping makeup requirements, since the recycling of these in the kraft pulping process is quite efficient. But larger amounts of chlorine, sodium hydroxide, sodium chlorate, sulphuric acid, sulphur dioxide and calcium hydroxide are normally used on a once-through basis to the extent of 160 to 200 kilograms per metric ton of pulp.

The total non-recycled chemical requirement works out to an average of about 1.8 grams per cup.

Polystyrene is far superior to wood pulp for cup construction; only about one-sixth as much material is needed to produce a foam cup. Chemical requirements for the polystyrene foam cup are small because several of the stages in its preparation use catalysts that nudge the process along without being consumed themselves.

Alkylation of benzene with ethene (ethylene) also uses aluminum chloride catalytically to the extent of about 10 kilograms per metric ton of ethylbenzene produced.

The spent aluminum chloride is later neutralized with roughly the same amount of sodium hydroxide. Further small amounts of sulphuric acid and sodium hydroxide are also consumed to give a total chemical requirement of about 33 kilograms per metric ton of polystyrene.

This works out to 0.05 grams per cup, or about 3 per cent of the chemical requirement of the paper cup.

### Utility consumption

In terms of energy consumption, polystyrene cups also appear to come out ahead. One paper cup consumes about 12 times as much steam, 36 times as much electricity, and twice as much cooling water as one polystyrene foam cup, while producing 58 times the volume of waste water.

The contaminants present in the waste water from pulping and bleaching operations are removed to varying degrees, but the residuals (with

the exception of metal salts) still amount to 10 to 100 times those present in the waste-water streams from polystyrene processing.

Air pollution

The wholesale price of a paper cup is about 2.5 times that of polyfoam since it consumes more in terms of raw materials and energy. But their respective purchase prices are not so closely linked to the environmental costs of productions and recycling or final disposal. Air emissions total 22.7 kilograms per metric ton of bleached pulp compared to about 53 kilograms per metric ton of polystyrene.

On a per-cup basis, however, this comparison becomes 0.23 grams for paper versus 0.08 grams for polyfoam.

Emissions

In terms of mass, the 43 kilograms of pentane employed as the blowing agent for each metric ton of the foamable beads used to make polystyrene foam cups is the largest single emission to air from the two technologies.

Pentane’s atmospheric lifetime is estimated to be seven years or less, about a tenth that of the chlorofluorocarbons formerly used in some foamable beads. Unlike the chlorofluorocarbons, pentane would tend to cause a net increase in ozone concentrations, both at ground level and in the stratosphere.

However, its contributions to atmospheric ozone and as a “greenhouse effect” gas are almost certainly less than those of the methane losses generated from disposal of paper cups in landfill sites.

If the six metric tons of paper equivalent to a metric ton of polystyrene completely biodegrade anaerobically in a landfill, theoretically the paper could generate 2,370 kilograms of methane along with 3,260 kilograms of carbon dioxide.

Both are “greenhouse gases” that contribute to global warming.

Recycling

The technical side of recycle capability with polystyrene foam is straightforward. All that is required is granulation and washing, followed by hot-air drying and re-extrusion of the resin for re-use. Though recycled resin may not be used in food applications, this only partially limits the many possible uses for recycled polystyrene products.

Such uses are in packaging materials, insulation, flotation billets, patio furniture and drainage tiles.

An improved collection infrastructure is all that is needed to make this option a more significant reality and convert this perceived negative aspect of polyfoam use to a positive one.

Paper cups use a non-water soluble hot melt or solvent-based adhesive to hold the parts together.

For this reason, cups are technically excluded from paper recycling programs because the adhesive resin cannot be removed during repulping.

If the paper is coated with a plastic film or wax, this too prevents recycling, at least for renewed paper products.

Final disposal

Polystyrene is relatively inert to decomposition when discarded in landfill. However, there is also increasing evidence that disposal of paper to landfill does not necessarily result in degradation or biodecomposition, particularly in arid regions.

In wet landfills, where degradation occurs, the paper cup produces methane, a gas which has five to 20 times greater global-warming effect than carbon dioxide. Water-soluble fragments of cellulose from the decomposition also contribute biochemical oxygen demand to leachate (any water that percolates through the land-filled waste) from the landfill.

Leachate may be treated to remove contaminants to control environmental impact on discharge, or may be lost to surface waters or underground aquifers (a porous rock layer that holds water) to exacerbate the oxygen demand in these raw water sources.

Thus, as a result of our analysis, it would appear that polystyrene foam cups are the ecologically better choice.

At the very least, they appear to be no worse than paper in one-use applications, contrary to the instinctive consumer impression.

Explorations:

Peter Kruus, *Chemicals in the Environment*  
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*  
<http://www.ec.gc.ca/ecocycle/>  
<http://www.wincup.com/foamfaq2.htm>  
<http://www.dartcontainer.com/Web/Environ.nsf/Pages/EnvironmentalFacts>

Structure:

- 1. How does the opening prepare us for Hocking’s argument?
- 2. Identify the THESIS STATEMENT.
- 3. Hocking’s argument is a model *comparison and contrast* of paper and foam cups, organized *point by point*. Identify each of these major points.
- 4. Find three passages where Hocking reasons through *cause and effect*.
- 5. Do the subtitles help? Have you tried subtitles yourself?

### Style:

1. What AUDIENCE does Hocking write for in this condensation of a scientific journal article? Are the many technical terms a barrier to these readers? Are they to you? Why or why not?

### Argumentation and Persuasion:

1. Written by a scientist, "Capping the Great Cup Debate" is the most *argumentative* essay of this chapter. Can you find any passage at all that appeals to *emotion* rather than *reason*? Does all the logic reduce your interest in this essay, or does the quality of thought increase it?
2. As the introduction to this chapter suggests, science is based on *induction*. In saying "A comparative analysis . . . leads to the inevitable conclusion that foam cups are better . . ." (paragraph 4), scientist Martin Hocking in fact labels his argument as *inductive*. Is he right? How fully does he base his conclusion on evidence? Does he successfully avoid reasoning from prior values or assumptions?
3. How much of this argument consists of *examples*? How many are numeric (statistics)?
4. *Comparison and contrast, cause and effect, massive examples and process analysis* all help Hocking make his point. Do you think he planned to use these all, or did some just appear as he wrote? How fully *should* we organize before writing?

### Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Did you think paper cups were better for the environment? Do you still, or did Hocking change your mind? Tell why.
2. "Think globally, act locally," say environmentalists. Consider the pollution caused by disposable pens, lighters, razors, towels and tissues, plastic wrap, diapers, paper plates — and cups, whether paper or foam. What "acts" could you perform to help "globally"?
3. Name one act you already perform to reduce pollution.
4. Is science outside the realm of values? Or are scientists responsible for the good and bad effects of their discoveries? Defend your view with examples, including Hocking.
5. Which is more important to you right now, the economy or the environment? Which will seem more important by the time you have grandchildren? What implications can you *deduce* from your answer?
6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** At the library, read and take notes on how vitamin C affects humans, making sure your evidence comes from the work of scientists, not health faddists. Let this collected evidence lead to your **THESIS STATEMENT**: whether or not taking large doses of vitamin C improves our health. Now write your argument of induction, using any form(s) of orga-

nization that work, but basing your argument very heavily on evidence. (Your teacher may advise whether to document informally or use full MLA style.) Proofread any quotations word for word against the originals, and be sure to enclose them, even short phrases of two or three words, in quotation marks. Now read your draft aloud. Does its STYLE promote thought or does it promote feeling? Replace any loaded or very INFORMAL words with more OBJECTIVE ones. State your conclusion clearly. Finally, edit for things like spelling and punctuation as you produce the final version.

Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.

# KAREN CONNELLY

## August 4\*

At age 16 Karen Connelly had become, as she later wrote, "painfully bored with high school and hungry for living knowledge of the world." So she applied to an exchange program and the next year left her home of Calgary, Alberta, for Denchai, a village in northern Thailand. There she lived a year of strong emotion: culture shock, wonder at the sights and smells and sounds of the tropics, pleasure at making new friends, and fulfillment in learning a language and culture and landscape so different from her own. So strong was her desire to live life that she later wrote, "I regret having needed to sleep in Thailand. I should have been awake constantly, I should have learned more." Though it took time from her new life, she wrote regularly in a journal, then for years afterward, living in several more countries, polished these observations till they became *Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal*. When the intensely lyrical work was published in 1992, Connelly became the youngest person ever to win the Governor General's Award for Nonfiction. From this book comes our selection, "August 4." Connelly's list of publications continues to grow: In 1990 she had published a book of poetry, *The Small Words in My Body*, which won the Pat Lowther Memorial Award. In 1993 appeared *This Brighter Prison: A Book of Journeys*; in 1995 another travel memoir, *One Room in a Castle: Letters from Spain, France & Greece*; in 1997 another book of poetry, *The Disorder of Love*; and in 2000 still another volume of poems, *The Border Surrounds Us*. In it she reflects on her many crossings of "borders," and on her political engagement with countries such as Burma. Connelly now divides her time between Canada, Burma and Greece.

Every day something happens and I don't have time to write it down. When an event goes unwritten, I think, I will not forget this day, that moment, the words from that laughing mouth. There is so much I haven't written down, and even more that I haven't touched. The days tear away so quickly now. I fear I'll wake one morning and discover I'm old. I will look backwards into the past and know that all the years I lived were only a few long moments, and that I never knew enough. I've called the airline in Bangkok to confirm my flight date, August 19, two days short of a full year. I don't want to go back.

Every roadside, every wild morning journey to Prae, to the market, even pedalling over the bridge in the morning — again and again, I meet stories and pass them by because there is not enough time to

spin out the sensations and web them into words. I am too alive and the days are never still.

I ride into the fields and find two women. While they bathe at the well, a blade of grass comes to life and glides onto the stones. The women shriek, the wind blows down from the sky and six sand-coloured dogs lope across the field. In movements from a dance, the women flay the pearly green snake with sticks. It is five feet long, thick as a sailing line, still and bloody on the stones. The women's long hair slides over their shoulders and into their eyes. The *pasins* they wear blossom vermilion, blue, yellow; the sky behind them bruises purple-grey with rain. When one of the women spears the snake with a stick and swings it over her head, the dogs leap barking into the air, underbellies creamy white. As the snake whips beyond them, they rush after it, growling and snapping their jaws.

All this splendid horror in seconds, in the rice field behind the monastery. The women bend down again to the water. Was the twisting snake real? Did I see it?

Will I remember this sky and the people beneath it? Ajahn Champa<sup>o</sup> was right when she said a year ago (a year! why so fast?) that Thailand would become a dream to me. It already is, but one I live daily. "Canada will soon be real again," she said the other day. Canada. Canada. I push the word over on my tongue. The country of cold rocks. Was I born there?

I believe everything now, take it literally when new market women ask me where I've come from. Without thinking, I answer "the river" or "the school" or "the old temple." I don't even consider another country. This one is enough.

Canada? The word itself is a question now.

## Explorations:

Karen Connelly,

*Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal*

*One Room in a Castle: Letters from Spain, France & Greece*

Peter Mayle, *A Year in Provence*

Barbara Hodgson, *The Tattooed Map*

Rosa Jordan, *Dangerous Places: Travels on the Edge*

Ronald Wright, *Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico*

Isabella Tree, *Islands in the Clouds: Travels in the Highlands of New Guinea*

<http://www.nectec.or.th/WWW-VL-Thailand.html>

<http://www.poets.ca/linktext/direct/connelly.htm>

<http://shanmonster.bla-bla.com/interview/001.html>

\* Editor's title.

<sup>o</sup> Ajahn Champa: Connelly's teacher.

## Structure:

1. How do the opening (par. 1) and the closing (5–7) of this selection reflect each other? What is the effect?
2. Point out the THESIS STATEMENT of this selection.

## Style:

1. Why does Connelly write “August 4” in the present tense? Is this choice apt for a *description*?
2. When in paragraph 2 the author tells us “there is not enough time to spin out the sensations and web them into words”; when in paragraph 3 the “blade of grass comes alive”; when the women’s garments, their *pasins*, “blossom vermillion, blue, yellow”; and when “the sky behind them bruises purple-grey with rain”; what FIGURE OF SPEECH is the author exploiting? How does it strengthen her *description*?
3. Analyse how ONOMATOPOEIA contributes to the view of Canada expressed in “Canada. Canada. I push the word over on my tongue. The country of cold rocks” (par. 5).

## Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Connelly was only 17 when she kept the journal that became *Touch the Dragon*. Yet in paragraph 1 she writes, “I fear I’ll wake one morning and discover I’m old. I will look backwards into the past and know that all the years I lived were only a few long moments, and that I never knew enough.” Do you find these words chilling? How does Connelly try to fight this fear of time passing? How would you?
2. “Every day something happens and I don’t have time to write it down,” says Connelly in her first words. Is writing the way to retain experience? To interpret and understand it? How does it compare to direct experience? Do you keep a diary? A journal? What are the benefits? What are the limits?
3. Connelly sums up the episode of the women, the snake and the dogs as “all this splendid horror . . . ” (par. 4). Why “horror”? Why “splendid”?
4. In paragraphs 4 and 5 the author keeps wondering if the things she sees are “real,” if she will “remember” them, and if returning from the “dream” of Thailand will make Canada “real” again. Do your own major experiences ever seem unreal? Give an example.
5. In the preface to *Touch the Dragon* Connelly describes her boredom at age 16 in Calgary, and how she hoped “to escape from Canada and go very far away.” Have you gone on a student exchange, or had another long experience far away? Was it good or bad? *Describe* one

event or scene that gives the flavour of it. Or do you hope to stay right where you are? Tell why. Or have you already come here from another country? If so, have you begun to forget your first home, as Connelly in Thailand began to forget hers? Will you go back to visit? Why or why not?

6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Developing question 5 just above, freewrite on your stay in a far place (for an AUDIENCE in Canada), or, if you have immigrated to Canada, freewrite on your first months here (for a hypothetical AUDIENCE in your first country). Do you see an overall point, like Connelly’s observation that “I don’t want to go back”? If so, put it into a THESIS STATEMENT and incorporate it into your first draft. Now think of your readers: to help them “live” your experience, do what Connelly did. Pack your account with examples, with images, with appeals to the senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste). Add these elements of description wherever you can. Finally, check for spelling and punctuation before you print off your best version.*

*Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.*

## A Plea for the Physical

*Born in Calgary and raised in Montreal, Kate Braid earned a B.A. in English and history at Mount Allison University in 1967, and in 1979 an M.A. in Communications at Simon Fraser University. Her thesis, Invisible Women: Women in Non-Traditional Occupations in B.C., signalled the path her future life would take. Having worked at such traditional women's jobs as secretary, child care worker and receptionist, she found herself living in a rural area where there was a desperate shortage of labourers to build a new school. She tried this new life, liked it, became an apprentice and then a qualified union carpenter. For 15 years she built high-rises, bridges, and parts of Vancouver's Sky Train system — then during a time when union work was scarce, founded her own company, Sisters Construction, to renovate and build houses. Meanwhile Braid kept a journal. Eventually she wrote articles about being a woman in the trades, and also began writing poetry. In 1991 her first book of poems, Covering Rough Ground, won the Pat Lowther Award. Then in 1995 appeared another collection, To This Cedar Fountain, inspired by the West-Coast painter Emily Carr (see Carr's own essay in Chapter 3 of this book), and in 1998 a nonfiction book on Carr, Inward to the Bones. Now teaching Creative Writing at Malaspina College in Nanaimo, Braid lives in the house she built at Burnaby. Our selection, celebrating the physicality of her life as a carpenter, appeared in the June 1996 Canadian Forum.*

1 **I**n North America, we are losing touch with the physical. We drive rather than walk, use computers or telephones rather than visit, would rather work in a nice clean office than get "dirty" using our bodies at blue-collar work. Only slowly have I learned how vital it is to be in touch with the physical.

2 Perhaps it has something to do with our North American aversion to dirt. I will never forget once dropping into a small café in Mexico City for a drink with a friend on a hot day. The owner had just taken an earlier patron's glass off the counter and was casually flicking it under a stream of cold water. When I asked for an orange soda, the man whipped the wet glass onto the counter without so much as a pass of his dirty tea towel, and, after swishing the flies from its mouth, he began to pour orange soda from a half-empty litre container. Then, in a single motion and with great elan, he reached behind him to take a second glass from among the dozen that rested, open-side up, on a once-white towel. Absently, he again swung his hand through a jungle of flies, swatting them aside to fill a second glass for my friend.

I hesitated only a second before drinking the orange mixture down. Cavalier as I was on the surface, I was sufficiently a child of North America to monitor every ache and pain during the next 24 hours to determine whether I had, as I fully expected, imbibed botulism with my orange.

An amazing thing happened: I didn't get sick. All my life, my aunts had spent routine hours scrubbing every tiny dark mark off gleaming pots. My mother, with six children, made sure her wooden floors were a miracle of wax and polish. "Good enough to eat off!" she used to brag about those floors, and they were certainly cleaner than the café owner's counter. I was the obedient daughter in a good Christian house where cleanliness was next to godliness, but in that tiny Mexican café I realized with a shock (and some small delight) that the frenzied cleaning of the women in my family was now something to be questioned rather than emulated. A little dirt, I now knew, wouldn't kill me.

Even Europeans, I later learned, laugh at what they see as a North American obsession with hygiene and a desire to enclose everything in HandiWrap. My aunts still do not let any meat touch their lips that has not been fried, baked or boiled until it is grey in colour, cardboard in consistency and devoid of even a single germ.

North Americans are loath even to touch each other. In most other cultures of the world, men and women shake hands, embrace, even kiss, upon meeting or leaving each other. Not North Americans. Too many germs. Too physical. When we touch each other accidentally in public, we apologize.

Perhaps this purism is one reason why I eventually chose to work in the trades doing physical work. As a construction carpenter, I began to see what I had been missing. North American distaste for the physical is reflected in the fact that, when it comes to manual work, most Canadians don't even know what a trade is — except that "vocational" in high school is where the "dumb" guys go.

The word "trade" was first recorded in 1546 to distinguish a "skilled handicraft" from a profession, business or unskilled occupation. In Europe, there is a centuries-long tradition of tradespeople as vital, highly respected members of the community. First there was farming, then crafts or trades. Until recently, many British tradesmen went to work in a shirt and tie. There is a legend that the masters didn't even bother to change, so careful were they, so good at their craft that not even a small splash of mud could escape their skilled hand.

But above all, painting, carpentry and plumbing are physical. The apprentice who has tried to match a colour or cut a straight line — so easy in the journeyman's hands — is shocked to find how difficult it is when she tries it herself. The apprentice spends one month of the year learning theory, in school. During the other eleven, she learns how to move her body and her hands. The body must know.

10 Consider the advantages of a tradesperson. Here is someone who never has to pay for a gym. "Workout" is a part of her daily routine. Tradespeople have more bad backs but fewer heart attacks than the general population. Although most of them will deny any physical awareness of the job, for me there is a physical exhilaration, a feeling of being intensely alive that comes from working outside every day, under the sun and in the wind and rain, in a rhythm of bend and nail and lift. As a tradesperson, I developed a relationship with my body that was never demanded by more traditional "women's" work in an office or school.

11 An awareness of pain and physical resistance, though a routine part of being a physical worker, was a revelation to me. As a girl, I was taught that if something hurt or was difficult, I should run to Mummy, who would "fix it". Even if someone "hurt" my feelings, she would advise me to "go play with someone else", avoid pain.

12 But as a construction worker, I learned that the need to push past resistance — even if it hurts — is part of the job. A favourite saying in carpentry is, "If it doesn't fit, hit harder." The only reason you would stop work was in case of a wound that offered significant amounts of blood. Pain was a new physical sensation that could be pushed through. Pain, I learned, would not kill me any more than dirt would. It was not uncommon to come home and notice, for example, deep purple bruises on my legs that I had no memory of receiving. I had learned how to accept certain knocks and strains as part of the physicalness of doing a job. My mind had learned to drown out the incidental pain of physical labour, the pain that didn't present immediate danger. This was a liberation. I was no longer kept busy servicing my body with bandages and "rest". I felt stronger, more confident, less vulnerable to hurt in the world at large.

13 Often we call such behaviour "macho" and attach it to certain less-than-intelligent males. It's only a little embarrassing to say that I have learned to enjoy this macho. I recognized it in my second year when I worked on a high-rise building with an older, heavy-set journeyman. We were on the fourth floor when it became obvious that one of us was going to have to put on the safety belt and swing out over space to finish nailing columns.

14 This man — perhaps because of his age, perhaps because of his Old European background — had been desperately trying to "protect" me by not letting me do many of the more difficult jobs that go with heavy construction. But as we stood contemplating the columns, we both knew that, according to the rules of apprenticeship, I, as the younger, fitter apprentice, should go out on the columns, while he, as journeyman, had the right to stay behind and "supervise", passing tools and material. When I saw that he did not want to go, in spite of his determination to protect me, I volunteered. Reluctantly, he agreed. Quivering with eagerness, I buckled on the safety belt made for someone several

sizes larger, filled my pockets with nails, anchored the belt and swung out over 40 feet of space.

15 After the headiness settled down, I thought, "This is what bodies can do. They can push things, pull things, build things, and they can throw themselves out over clear air to hang suspended while arms and hands do the work that is called for. Why would anybody avoid this?" There was a fierceness of concentration that day, an *I'm alive here!* feeling that popped champagne bubbles all up and down my veins — like rock-climbing but getting paid for it. I had discovered the crushed-ice taste of fear and exhilaration and physical strength and when I swung back to the solid concrete of the deck, I had changed. Suddenly I understood the puffed out chest, the swagger of macho. I had danced the fine footwork of danger, pushed past fear, and survived. Now I, too, was entitled to boast. This is why carpenters and mountaineers and farmers walk with a certain confidence. We push to the physical limits and survive. But more. As tradespeople, we do what has to be done — building things, fixing things, keeping electricity, water and power moving. These are things physical, unquestionably creations, things of value. And so the unshakable calm of tradespeople — we do this thing. It is useful.

16 There is sanity and connection in the physical. It is literally "knowing where you are", being "rooted". This struck me most clearly after I lived two years in a rural area without a telephone. My friends and I regularly connected by dropping in on each other or going out to have a coffee at the café when we felt like company, staying home when we did not. But eventually, for reasons of work, I had to have a telephone. When I got my first call, I found myself white-knuckled, clutching the receiver, saying over and over to the caller, "Where are you? Where are you?"

"Here," he replied, puzzled. "I'm here, at home."

17  
18 Two minutes later I'd have to ask again, "But where are you?" Intellectually, of course, I knew where he was, but like a child who nods at the voice on the telephone, I had physically and emotionally forgotten within two years that technology allows a voice without a body.

19 Sharon Butala, author of *Perfection of the Morning*, spent years wandering alone, on foot, through the grassy hills near her ranch in the Palliser triangle in southwestern Saskatchewan, where she had inexplicable and powerful experiences. She was moved to follow certain courses, and at the end she found Native paths and spiritual sites, as if the land itself could instruct all people if only they listened carefully enough.

20 Butala thinks that our habit of living a life increasingly detached from the earth — of riding in cars, living in cities, of "paving Paradise", as Joni Mitchell puts it — is steadily cutting us off from one of the most powerful physical influences we have, the land. People's resulting spiritual desolation and feelings of abandonment (even when it is we who are abandoning the land and not vice versa) are reflected in a general sense of fear and a lashing out in violence.

21 I wrestled for a while with the contradiction that I, as a construction worker, was one of those people "paving Paradise" — and enjoying it. Then I recognized the truth of what Butala wrote, and I phoned her to thank her for her book. Butala said she now thinks this is why we, as a civilization, are increasingly fascinated by space. We send men and women to the moon, we create movies like *Star Wars* that become objects of semi-religious reverence, we see a steady increase in the popularity of science fiction as a literary genre. We are using technology as a way to increase our separation from nature and the physical. Perhaps this is not entirely voluntary, I suggested. Perhaps the technology — e-mail, telephones, fax machines — makes us run to catch up, but running means we have less time to touch down, to be in touch with our own selves, until finally we don't dare slow down for fear of what pent-up demons will pour forth when we do.

22 "Perhaps," Butala said. "At any rate, we are getting further and further away from the earth, to the point that our feet have almost left the ground and we are floating up toward the stars, in danger of becoming completely out of touch." We are becoming a nation of space people.

23 This increasing sense of being "out of touch" with our bodies, of not having our feet on the ground, is reflected in our fascination with computers. Within 10 years we have gone from a culture that was impressed by an electric typewriter to a culture where more than one in four of all households have at least one personal computer on which adults and kids spend hours "surfing the net", playing games, doing homework, not looking at each other, not touching each other. People make up whole personas for themselves, change genders, "meet" and "date" without ever setting eyes on a living human being. Of course, this is one way to overcome many of the assumptions and stereotypes of racism, sexism and homophobia, but it comes at a price. Our e-mail addresses have become a vital part of our identity, along with fax numbers and telephones.

24 Many people are uncomfortable with computers because, they say, there is no body language to a computer, no facial expression or voice, no physical cues, only the word. Perhaps the Bible got it all wrong. In the beginning was not the Word. In the beginning was the Body and we have been moving away from it, at our own cost, ever since.

25 Computer networks are not without benefits. They do offer invaluable sources of information where up-to-the-minute international events can be transferred by grassroots channels, not controlled by the small number of wealthy elites who own the press and TV. I was recently on a network where messages came directly from Commander Marcos of the rebel Indian forces in Chiapas, Mexico, telling us what happened in the field that day from the Native perspective. Occasionally we would see this same information, from a very different viewpoint, in the next day's newspaper. Our "net" source helped us know more of the truth.

"Good night," Commander Marcos would sign off. "I hear the military planes flying overhead, and I must extinguish my candle, but I wish you all God speed and I will be back tomorrow." Even the Internet can't help but deliver some of the poetry of drama.

But a computer can't deliver a touch. There is no crinkling of paper, no sharp smell of ink, no tight neatness of a newspaper freshly laid on your table, no satisfying weight of a good, thick book. Computers offer only the crackle of keys, the strain of arms and neck in a single position for as long as you can hold it. This is not physical connection. This is torture.

Maybe this explains the profound but simple pleasure people take in gardening. When you ask what they like about gardening, these folk answer vaguely, "I don't know. I just like to get my hands in the dirt." One First Nations woman told me her people believe that burying a personal amulet in the earth for three days cleanses it, as only Mother Earth is large enough to take away all our negative energies and replace them with positive.

William Gibson has been recognized with numerous awards for his work on science fiction novels that portray a possible computer future just over the horizon. His fantasies are so realistic, so consistent with the present course of events, that inventors have developed some of the concepts and machines he describes because they make such sense as consistent moves "forward" from where we now stand with technology. Gibson describes a world far from Butala's, where the population spend much of their lives artificially stimulated by drugs and "sim-stims", virtual realities so real that people see no need to go to the trouble of immersing themselves in the real, messy, physical world itself.

People travel, work and communicate in "cyberspace" (a word Gibson invented), which is nothing more than an accumulation of all known technical data, a non-place. Artificial intelligences meet and "mate" and exercise awesome political and economic authority. Simulation has reached such refined heights that the rich can even survive and interact (by TV screen and simulation) without any physical body whatsoever. The physical remnants float in heavily guarded tanks that hold elaborate mixes of chemical and electronic impulses. In other words, according to Gibson, we are on our way to no bodies at all.

This would be a tragedy. A sensitivity to the physical creates a still place in ourselves, a place of calm, reason and perspective, a place of reconnection. This is the value of the physical and all that accompanies and promotes it — be it physical work like construction, a beautiful sunset, one's hands in the dirt of the garden or simply a willingness to reach out and shake a neighbour's hand — grounds us. They allow us to take a deep breath and think, "Yes, it's OK. I am here."

### Explorations:

Kate Braid,

*To This Cedar Fountain* (poems)

*Covering Rough Ground* (poems)

Tom Wayman, ed., *Going for Coffee: An Anthology of Contemporary North American Working Poems*

Brooks, Carellin, ed., *Bad Jobs*

*Cabin at Singing River* by Chris Czajkowski

Ross A. Laird, *Grain of Truth: The Ancient Lessons of Craft*

<http://pi-flora.com/pi/write/kb/default.htm>

<http://www.edgewisecafe.org/words/KateBraid/ToSeaAgain.html>

### Structure:

1. Kate Braid's THESIS STATEMENT is the last sentence of paragraph 1. Point out everything the rest of this opening paragraph does to prepare us for her argument of *contrast*.
2. Braid leaves extra space on the page to mark where each point ends and the next begins. Find these spaces. Note how her four sections build a "point by point" contrast of the sedentary life and the physical life. Now identify the main *contrasts* given in each section.
3. Has Braid reached the recommended 50% minimum level of *example* content? Point out your two or three favourites, and tell what they do for her argument.

### Style:

1. Several essayists in this book are also poets: Karen Connelly, Anne Michaels, Félix Leclerc, Evelyn Lau, Joy Kogawa and Dionne Brand. Where in Kate Braid's essay do you find language suggesting that she, too, is a poet?

### Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Are you more at home hiking in the woods or riding on the subway? Taking the stairs or the escalator? Having a sweaty workout or watching a hockey game on TV? Shovelling snow or checking your e-mail? Give reasons why you prefer either the physical or the sedentary.
2. Adult Canadians spend an average of 22 hours a week on the cesterfield watching TV. Do you? Why or why not? *Contrast* three other, more physical, ways to spend your leisure time.
3. In paragraph 12 Braid describes her exhilaration at "pushing past resistance" and pain. Were you brought up to endure, to ignore

pain, to just keep on? Or were you taught to be careful, to protect yourself, to avoid pain? Which attitude works better in the world as you know it? Give reasons.

4. Braid is a woman doing a traditional man's job. Give examples of 5 traditional "men's" jobs and 5 traditional "women's" jobs. *Contrast* them. Have you ever ignored gender roles in your own employment life or in your choice of studies? How did it work out? Is this the future?
5. In paragraphs 19–22 Braid discusses author Sharon Butala's concept of the land. Read Butala's own essay on this subject, "Field of Broken Dreams" (Chapter 9). *Compare* Braid's views and Butala's about our place on this earth.
6. In Chapter 8 Stephen Leacock tells us humorously "How to Live to Be 200." *Contrast* his views of physicality with those of Braid.
7. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Develop your own essay contrasting the physical and the sedentary. First brainstorm a page to choose a focus: Work life? Sport? Hobbies? Recreation? Or what else? Once you have focussed, draw a vertical line down the middle of another page, and brainstorm on both sides of the line, putting the physical way on the left and the non-physical way on the right. Look over what you have produced, and take sides with a THESIS STATEMENT. (For example, is hockey more enjoyable on the ice or in front of the TV? Are holidays best enjoyed with a car and hotel reservations, or hiking the backpacking trail? Does a good job provide physical challenge, or does it keep you comfortable and air-conditioned at your desk?) Now write a discovery draft, filling it with SENSE IMAGES and examples, as Braid does. Do logic signals highlight your contrast ("but," "on the other hand," "however," "by contrast," etc.)? Have you cut all deadwood? After a final editing, print off your best version to share with the class.*

*Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.*

## Avoiding the Big C: A Little Simple Advice

Patricia Pearson is the granddaughter of Lester B. Pearson, prime minister of Canada from 1963 to 1968, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for resolving the Suez Crisis of 1956 with his proposal to create a United Nations peacekeeping force. When Pierre Trudeau died in 2001, Patricia Pearson wrote a moving column in the *National Post*, recalling how at age 8 she was devastated by the death of her beloved grandfather, and how, like Trudeau's family, hers had to hear the events broadcast on the public media, and share the state funeral with the nation. Later she lived several years in New York City, but now resides with her husband and two children in Toronto, where she is a columnist for the *National Post* and *USA Today*. Pearson also writes on a great variety of subjects for other publications and for television, both in Canada and the United States. Her article on the notorious killer Karla Homolka, "Behind Every Successful Psychopath," won a *National Magazine Award*, and in 1997 appeared in her widely-read book *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, which demolished the myth that women, unlike men, are incapable of violence. Our own selection, which showcases Pearson's lively and personal approach to journalism, is a *National Post* column from August 28, 1999.

The *New England Journal of Medicine* recently reported that "longer-legged people are significantly more prone to certain types of cancer." Indeed. Well, that's a huge relief for me. I can never see over anybody's head in a crowd. Guess I'll snicker at the supermodels and fry myself another burger.

What else, exactly, am I supposed to do with this information? Science, you may have noticed, pelts us daily with new studies on everything that causes cancer, everything that prevents it — and everything that they thought caused cancer before but they now realize actually prevents it.

At the moment, for example, I know that if I stay short, drink red wine, eat tomatoes and olive oil, avoid working in a coke foundry, avoid cigars, sleep more, take Aspirin, swallow Vitamin E, alter my estrogen levels, sip green tea, shun charcoal briquettes, dine on fish — but not from the Great Lakes — reduce my stress level and stay clear of Eastern Europe, my chances of dying from cancer will be reduced for the time being.

But it turns out that the sunblock that I've been slopping all over myself for five years may be carcinogenic, whereas sunburn is now

thought to act as a cancer preventive. Meanwhile, the spinach and apples I've been eating all these years to bust cancer are laden with cancer-causing residues.

Likewise, Vitamin C, long touted as an antioxidant par excellence in megadoses, may actually change the structure of our DNA in such a way that . . . guess what? It makes us more susceptible to cancer.

And those soft plastic dishes I've been using to microwave my anti-cancer vegetable recipes? They cause cancer.

You may recall that a cancer-fighting diet book came out a while back. After chumps like me went out and bought it, an army of doctors charged forth and repudiated its findings.

Well, isn't that just great. I wanted to phone my mom to tell her how I've had it up to here (writer's hand slicing sideways at chin level) with trying to keep track of every eensy-weensy obscure bit of research on health dangers. But I'd just read that cell phones were being implicated in brain tumours.

It seems to me, the more I think about it, that what this whole explosion in medical research is actually discovering is that sooner or later people die. Of course, scientists are finding out other things that are useful to them, but they are not very useful to me. What all this research is generating in people is the expectation that somehow they don't have to die — that if they can only get *all the information* they can beat the odds.

If you talk to an insurance actuary, you'll be told what people actually die of, cancer-wise: smoking. Smoking is way, way up there with automobile accidents and heart attacks. And you don't need to read any more studies to know what to do about that one. Every other prevention strategy, in my opinion, is a crapshoot.

From now on, I follow the only recipe for longevity that's ever actually made sense to me: moderation in all things. A little wine, a nice walk, a good dish of pasta, a minimal amount of microwaving in Tupperware containers, a dash of olive oil, a soupçon of Vitamin C, a very brief visit to a foundry. Live life modestly — except during the holidays and when you've been dumped by your boyfriend — and hope for the best. It's all you can do.

### Explorations:

Patricia Pearson, *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*

[http://66.59.133.182/english/RD\\_Overview.asp](http://66.59.133.182/english/RD_Overview.asp)

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/bc/>

<http://www2.cancer.org/>

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/Organizations/Canprevent/7ways.htm>

### Structure:

1. Pearson starts right off with the odd idea that “long-legged people are significantly more prone to certain types of cancer.” What does this opening do for her readers?
2. Though Pearson informs us early as to her subject and point of view, her actual THESIS STATEMENT is kept in reserve till the first sentence of the last paragraph, where she advises “moderation in all things.” Name one advantage of placing it at the end. Name one potential disadvantage. Why in most essays does it come at or near the beginning?
3. Roughly what percentage of her essay space does Pearson devote to *examples*? Tell two or three of your favourites. Has she reached the recommended 50% level? Point out which paragraphs are built entirely or mostly of examples.
4. In this essay of *cause and effect*, Pearson first questions current medical views on what does or does not *cause* cancer, before going on to her own advice. Have you tried to follow any of the popularly believed techniques in paragraph 3? Do her exposés of once-accepted but now rejected beliefs in paragraphs 4–7 seem to question the validity of the beliefs in paragraph 3? Finally, does the fact that she has made fun of formerly accepted beliefs help us to accept her own points that (in paragraph 10) smoking is the most obvious *cause* of cancer, and (in her closing paragraph) that “moderation in all things” is the main *cause* of longevity?

### Style:

1. Does Pearson’s humorous TONE work with the very serious topic of cancer?
2. In paragraph 10 Pearson calls most cancer prevention strategies “a crapshoot.” Where else does she use very informal, COLLOQUIAL language? Does it work in her argument, or does it make us doubt her seriousness?

### Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Do you try to follow all the latest techniques to achieve the *effect* of good health, or do you just enjoy life and hope for the best? Argue for one of these points of view, giving reasons.
2. If you have read Stephen Leacock’s essay “How to Live to Be 200” (in Chapter 8), compare the attitude of Jiggins, who “dumb-belled himself to death,” with that of modern health seekers who try to reach the ideal diet and lifestyle.

3. Who in your extended family has reached a very old age? Do you think this longevity was *caused* by the person’s lifestyle, or was the cause genetic? Give *examples*.
4. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** Patricia Pearson’s basic message is “moderation,” but in our time we are more likely to encounter the “extreme.” Why do so many of us seek extreme lifestyles, in areas such as food and drink, drugs, financial life, relationships, or in risky outdoor adventures? Fill a page with notes on this question, then narrow your focus down to one item — such as an “extreme sport” that you practice yourself. Analyze all the causes you can think of, or all the effects, and explain them in a first draft filled with examples. Examine it the next day. Does the THESIS STATEMENT unify your argument? Have you reached at least 50% example content? Do your points rise up to the most important at the end? After editing for content, polish the style, then bring your argument to class to read aloud.

*Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.*

Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

- 1. While stating “I believe in multiculturalism because it adds to our strength” (par. 16), Lam also advises New Canadians not to live “in either a physical or psychological ghetto” (par. 5). What is your view? Do you prefer the traditional American “melting pot” which is supposed to assimilate immigrants, or the Canadian “mosaic,” in which New Canadians are encouraged, even funded, to retain their first language and culture? Which path is better for the individual? For the nation?
- 2. David Lam’s adopted home of British Columbia is part of the Asia Pacific rim, and is itself one of the most multicultural spots on earth. If you live there, describe the ways in which the cosmopolitan mix of its population has influenced your own life. Or if you live in Toronto, Montreal or another cosmopolitan place, apply this topic to your own city.
- 3. Lam says “The day is quickly coming when people with only one culture will find it difficult to compete, let alone to prosper” (par. 14). Do you think this is true for your own intended profession? Why or why not? If so, what have you done to prepare? If your family has immigrated, what are you doing to keep your first language and culture? If your family has earlier roots in Canada, what other languages, if any, have you learned to speak? What experiences have you had to make yourself feel at home with other cultures?
- 4. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Whether you have immigrated, yourself, or only know others who have, think about the main challenges that face immigrants to Canada. Fill a page with brainstorming on this topic, then look it over. Circle or highlight the main points, choose your THESIS STATEMENT, then rearrange these thoughts into a short conventional outline that classifies the challenges. Are there at least three categories in your classification? Are any main ones missing? Are all classified by the same principle? Do any seem to overlap? Now write a rapid version of your essay of classification. The next day look it over. Does it have enough examples? If not, add. Do TRANSITIONS move the argument from one point to the next? If not, add. Finally, check the punctuation and spelling before printing out your best version.*

Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.

PHIL EDMONSTON

Dealer Scams

The man who came to be called “Canada’s toughest customer” was born in 1944 in Washington D.C. After three years as an army medic in Panama, and after taking a law degree, Edmonston went to work for “Nader’s Raiders,” helping the U.S. consumer advocate Ralph Nader force manufacturers to produce safer and more reliable cars. Edmonston then moved to Quebec, learned French, and resumed the fight. In 1974 appeared the first of his annual books, Lemon-Aid New Car Guide, rating all cars and exposing the “lemons.” Soon were added annual guides to used cars and to vans and trucks. Through his exposés Edmonston has forced the recall of millions of unsafe automobiles. Dealers cringe when customers bring in his books, and quote him on prices, on secret company memos exposing defects, and on frequency of repair ratings. In 1984 The Art of Complaining, on how to harass companies, joined the list. The huge and craggy-faced Edmonston became well-known on both French and English television, and in 1990 he was elected the first NDP Member of Parliament ever from Quebec. Edmonston has recently returned to live in Florida, but he still runs the non-profit Automobile Protection Association which he founded, and still oversees the U.S. and Canadian annual editions of his car books. Our selection is typical of his blunt advice, a passage from Lemon-Aid Used Car Guide 2002.<sup>o</sup>

Used vehicles are subject to the same deceptive sales practices employed by dealers who sell new vehicles. One of the more common tricks is to not identify the previous owner, because the vehicle either was used commercially or had been written off as a total loss from an accident. It’s also not uncommon to discover that the mileage has been turned back, particularly if the vehicle was part of a company’s fleet. These scams can be thwarted if you demand the name of the vehicle’s previous owner as a prerequisite to purchasing the vehicle.

Here are some of the more common fraudulent practices you’re likely to encounter.

Failing to declare full purchase price

This tactic, used almost exclusively by small, independent dealers, involves the salesperson telling the buyer that he or she can save on sales tax by listing a lower selling price on the contract. But what if the

<sup>o</sup> In recent editions *Lemon-Aid Used Cars* has dropped the short conclusion that used to round off this section. We have restored it, with the publisher’s permission, adding the 1994 conclusion to the 2002 edition of the piece itself.

vehicle turns out to be a lemon or the sales agent has falsified the model year or mileage? The hapless buyer will usually be offered a refund only on the fictitious purchase price indicated on the contract. If the buyer wanted to take the dealer to court, it's quite unlikely that he or she would get any more than the contract price. Moreover, both the buyer and the dealer could be prosecuted for making a false declaration to avoid paying sales tax.

#### Sales agents posing as private parties ("curbsiders")

Individuals sell about three times as many used vehicles as dealers. Some crooked dealers, though, are using agents to pose as private sellers in order to get a better price for their cars and to avoid paying GST and giving a warranty. Once again, this scam is easy to detect if the seller can't produce the original sales contract or show some repair bills made out in his or her own name. You can usually identify a car dealer in the want ads section of the newspaper by checking to see if the same telephone number is repeated in many different ads. Sometimes you can trip up a curbsider by requesting information on the phone, without identifying the specific vehicle. If the seller asks you which car you are considering, you then know you're talking to a dealer.

Most new-car dealers get very angry when one of these scamming teams hits town. Unfortunately they don't get angry enough, because they continue to sell used cars at wholesale prices to curbsiders, who they know are stealing their business and cheating consumers and tax authorities.

Curbsiders are particularly active in the west, buying cars at wholesale prices from dealers, auto auctions, and junkyards (some of these cars have been written off as total losses). They then place private classified ads in B.C. and Alberta papers, sell their stock, and leave town.

If you get taken by one of these scam artists, don't hesitate to sue the publication carrying the ad through small claims court for allowing this rip-off artist to operate.

#### "Free-exchange" privilege

Dealers get a lot of sales mileage out of this deceptive offer. The dealer offers to exchange any defective vehicle for any other vehicle in stock. What really happens, though, is that the dealer won't have any other vehicles selling for the same price and thus will demand a cash bonus for the exchange, or he or she may have nothing but lemons in stock.

#### "Money-back" guarantee

Once again, the purchaser feels safe in buying a used car with this kind of guarantee, because what could be more honest than a money-back guarantee? Dealers using this technique often charge exorbitant handling charges, rental fees, or mechanical repair costs to the customer who's bought one of these vehicles and then returned it.

#### "50/50" guarantee

This means that the dealer will pay half the repair costs over a limited period of time. It's a fair offer if an independent garage may do the repairs. If not, the dealer is free to inflate the repair costs to double their actual worth and write up a bill for that amount. The buyer winds up paying the full price of repairs that would probably have been much cheaper at an independent garage. The best kind of used-vehicle warranty is 100 percent with full coverage for a fixed term.

#### "As is" cars

Buying a vehicle "as is" means that you're aware of mechanical defects, that you're prepared to accept the responsibility for any damage or injuries caused by the vehicle, and that all costs to fix it shall be paid by you. The courts have held that the "as is" clause is not a blank cheque to cheat buyers and therefore must be interpreted in light of the seller's true intent. That is, was there an attempt to deceive the buyer by including this clause? Did the buyer really know what the "as is" clause could do to his or her future legal rights? It's also been held that the courts may consider oral representations ("parole evidence") that were never written into the formal contract. So that if a seller makes a statement as to the fine quality of the used car, it may now be considered evidence. Courts generally ignore "as is" clauses when the vehicle has been misrepresented, when the dealer is the seller, or when the defects are so serious that the seller is presumed to have known of their existence.

#### Odometer tampering

It's often too dangerous for the dealer to turn back the mileage, so independent outfits are hired to pick up the car or visit the dealership and "fix" the odometer, a practice allowed under Canadian federal law. For more recent models, a computer chip that turns back the odometer reading can be inserted for less than \$50.

Until federal and provincial statutes are toughened and convictions result in severe penalties to anyone engaging in this practice (American laws allow citizens to sue for triple damages plus lawyer and court costs), take steps to protect yourself. Demand that the dealer put the mileage figure on the contract and give you the name and address of the previous owner as well as all repair receipts. It would be smart to demand the same things of a private seller.

#### Misrepresentation

Used vehicles can be misrepresented in a variety of ways. A used airport commuter minivan may be represented as having been used by a Sunday school class. A mechanically defective pickup that's been rebuilt after several major accidents may have sawdust in its transmission to muffle the "clunks," heavy oil in the motor to stifle the "clanks," and

cheap retread tires to eliminate the “thumps.” These fraudulent practices may lead to the seller being charged with civil or criminal fraud. The best protection against these dirty tricks is to have the vehicle’s quality completely verified by an independent mechanic before completing the sale.

15 Used car sellers, both dealers and private individuals, will often find ingenious ways to turn a client away from making an inspection of the vehicle before purchasing it.

16 First, the dealer will often tell the purchaser, “it’s already been thoroughly inspected,” or assure him that “we’ll take care of anything that goes wrong,” or give him a written warranty. Other ploys used to dissuade a buyer from having the car independently inspected are:

- claiming the car cannot be moved without tags (actually, all dealers have “demo” tags for just this purpose)
- blaming lack of insurance (“demo” tags provide insurance coverage)
- offering a free inspection by the dealer’s own mechanic
- allowing too short a time to have the vehicle properly checked
- demanding a large, nonrefundable penalty if the sale is cancelled.

These tactics are warning signs that indicate the seller does not want to disclose the true condition of the vehicle. If the seller won’t let you take the car to an independent garage, don’t buy.

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**Explorations:**

Phil Edmonston,  
*Lemon-Aid Used Cars* (latest annual edition)  
*The Art of Complaining*  
<http://www.lemonaidcars.com/home.htm>  
[http://www.writersunion.ca/e/edmons\\_p.htm](http://www.writersunion.ca/e/edmons_p.htm)

**Structure:**

1. Identify Edmonston’s THESIS STATEMENT.
2. What proportion of this piece is given to *examples*? Would we grasp the argument without them? Do your essays have this many? If not, how could you find more to add?
3. Edmonston *classifies* his subject, using boldfaced subtitles as cues. Do any of his eight categories overlap? Can you think of any further categories he may have missed?

**Style:**

1. The METAPHOR “lemon” appears more than once in this essay, as well as in the title of Edmonston’s annual guide. Why is it used so often to describe cars?
2. Edmonston uses formal vocabulary such as “prerequisite” (par. 1), “exorbitant” (9) and “dissuade” (16), yet in the same essay also slang or colloquial terms such as “scam” (title), “rip-off artist” (7) and “lemons” (8). Does this mixture work? Why or why not?
3. Describe the AUDIENCE for Edmonston’s guide to used cars. What is its level of vocabulary? Of knowledge in the subject? How well has the author packaged the material so readers will understand it and like it?
4. Is the author angry? Disgusted? Pessimistic? Or just realistic? Analyze his TONE, giving examples.
5. In the middle of paragraph 14 we read of “clunks,” “clanks” and “thumps.” Read this sentence aloud, with emphasis. Analyze the effect of its SENSE IMAGES.

**Ideas for Discussion and Writing:**

1. Why is the used car business so prone to scams?
2. Which costs less in the long run: a new car? A good used car? A cheap used car? Give your reasons.
3. Give your own ways to tell a good used car from a lemon.
4. *Contrast* the advantages and disadvantages of buying a used car from a dealer and buying it from an individual.
5. Why is the car so central to our society? Analyze the main *causes*. Analyze the main *effects*.
6. Edmonston shows how, in buying used cars, some Canadians try to evade tax. Do you see such tactics of the underground economy as good business? As legitimate protest against overtaxation? Or as criminal and immoral behaviour? Give examples and reasons.
7. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** Write the words “USED CARS” in the middle of a page. Now write around them all the other words they make you think of. Connect related items with lines. From this cluster outline, now rapidly draft an essay of classification entitled “Kinds of Used Cars.” The next day look the draft over. Is every item classified by the same principle (for example all by age of the car, or by size, or by condition, or by price, etc.)? Are all main categories there? Do any overlap? Revise where necessary. Now add examples where your reader cannot yet “see” your point. Finally, check for things like grammar and spelling as you do your best version.

*Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.*

**Structure:**

- 1. In which paragraphs of this selection does Susanna Moodie rely most fully on *narration* to develop her *process analysis*?
- 2. Point out three passages where Moodie develops her subject of dandelion coffee through *comparison and contrast* with “common coffee.”
- 3. Explain how *cause and effect* helps to develop paragraph 6.

**Style:**

- 1. How FORMAL is the STYLE of this selection, especially in vocabulary, sentence length, and paragraph length? Give examples. Choose any very recent selection in this anthology, and *contrast* its style, giving examples.
- 2. Point out at least three SENSE IMAGES that help to bring Moodie’s prose alive.

**Ideas for Discussion and Writing:**

- 1. Is Moodie’s *process analysis* meant as directions? Is her recipe clear and exact enough for you to follow?
- 2. Though from a background of privilege and luxury in England, Susanna Moodie soon learned the prime survival tactic of the North American pioneer: innovation. Do we still have this ability in the new millenium? Give examples.
- 3. With your present abilities, could you have made it as a pioneer in Upper Canada of the 1830s? Give a verbal *process analysis* of one of your skills that would help you “rough it in the bush.”
- 4. In paragraph 2 Dr. Harrison praises dandelion coffee for putting us to sleep instead of “exciting wakefulness.” Why do so many of us in our time “excite wakefulness” with coffee, tea, or caffeinated soft drinks? Name at least three alternative, drug-free ways of staying alert.
- 5. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** Write a process analysis of something you do to avoid depending on a commercial product or service, as Moodie avoided commercial coffee. First take a page of notes, then use the best in a quick discovery draft. Looking it over later, add even more detail to help your reader follow the directions. Have you specified measurements of time or size or quantity? Have you defined terms your reader may not know? Have you used time signals to highlight the progression of steps? Now share your directions with a small group of classmates, then revise any step they didn’t understand. Finally, test your prose aloud before writing the finished version.

Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.

**EVELYN LAU**

**I Sing the Song of My Condo**

At age 18 Evelyn Lau caused a sensation with her memoir *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*. She had grown up in Vancouver, in a middle-class conservative home where her parents had urged her to study hard and become a doctor. From age 6, though, Lau knew she wanted to be a writer. When her parents ordered her to stop writing, the honour student left at age 14 for the street, where she spent several years in prostitution, drug addiction and depression. Then one day she entered the office of a literary agent with a 900 page diary of her life as a runaway. It was edited down, published in 1989, became a bestseller, and was made into a two-hour CBC television movie entitled *The Diary of Evelyn Lau*. Today Lau has left the street, makes a living from writing, and has built a reputation as one of the nation’s finest crafters of both poetry and prose. Among her subsequent publications are *You Are Not Who You Claim* (poems, 1990), *Oedipal Dreams* (poems, 1992), *Fresh Girls and Other Stories* (1993), *In the House of Slaves* (poems, 1994), *Other Women* (novel, 1995), *Choose Me* (stories, 1999), and *Inside Out — Reflections on a Life So Far* (2001). Though Lau’s schooling ended at grade 9, she has educated herself through serious reading, paying close attention to the style, even the sound, of the words on the page. This fine ear for language, and her success in putting it on her own page, shines through the prose of our selection, which appeared in the June 17, 1995 *Toronto Globe and Mail*.

Late in the spring of last year, my fancy turned to thoughts of real estate and I joined the growing ranks of Canadians in their 20s who were looking for their first homes.

I had been a renter since I was 16 and I never wanted to deal with a landlord again. Instead, I wanted to know what it was like to worry if I spilled wine on my carpet, to agonize over the exact placement of a picture before pounding a nail in my wall, to open a closet door or rest my forehead against a kitchen cabinet and think, “I own this.”

I went to the bank with a bundle of tax returns under my arm to prequalify for a first mortgage. After a long meeting during which the bank manager and I peered morosely at a computer screen and juggled numbers for savings, RRSPs and a writer’s erratic income into a yearly figure, I walked out with a brochure titled *Information for First Homebuyers* in my hand.

The people depicted in the brochures were not like anyone I knew. The women were blond, with sunny smiles, and their husbands looked both chiselled and paternal. They were engaged in chummy family

activities, like washing the dog or puttering in the garden, with the help of their model children. A white picket fence stood in soft focus in the background.

5 I knew then I wanted to live in the world of the mortgage brochures, which never showed these middle-class people lying awake among twisted sheets in their new master bedrooms or throwing up into their ceramic sinks from panic at hefty mortgages and rising interest rates. I wanted to sing the love song of the middle class. I wanted this to be the song of myself — a litany of mortgage payments and car payments, the weeping and gnashing at tax time, maximum RRSP payments and mutual funds, credit cards and credit's twin, debt.

6 Laura Cavanagh, the real-estate agent I acquired through a friend's connections, was an outgoing woman with tanned skin, long hair and hips so slim it seemed impossible she had two teenaged children. The male realtors we met in front of apartment buildings always held her hand for a beat too long and fastened their eyes upon hers with much intent and private meaning.

7 Together we toured a depressing number of 500-square-foot one-bedrooms listed by young married couples who had just had their first baby. Their apartments smelled of sour milk and spoiled food, and in the bedroom a crib took up whatever space the double bed did not already occupy. The vendor's agent would gamely point out that new carpets weren't that expensive, really, and if I enlisted the help of friends I could easily strip away the velvet-textured and dung-coloured wallpaper. He would flick on all the light switches and then exclaim, "And look at how bright this unit is!"

8 I became increasingly dejected at what my savings could afford in Vancouver, when I knew the same amount could buy a house, with acreage attached, in Saskatoon. Laura, however, remained true to her business card's slogan — "The realtor with a positive attitude" — and came to my apartment several times a week to show me yet another suite.

9 Over the months I grew fond of her. She was different from some of the other agents we encountered, who drove gold Mercedes and who staggered about in high heels and silk scarves, arrived late for appointments and then whipped us through the apartment while their pagers and cell phones incessantly beeped and rang. Laura held my hand when I made my first offer — and my second, third and fourth, all unsuccessfully — and comforted me after I had spent another sleepless night over interest-rate calculations.

10 As summer passed into fall, I discovered that acquiring a real-estate agent was like acquiring a stray kitten or a runaway child — it was a lifetime commitment. She reminded me of little Gertrude in John Cheever's *The Country Husband*, with her uncanny knack of showing up in places I did not expect. I would open my front door on a Saturday morning to pick up the paper and there she would be, showered and

perfumed, standing in the hallway and proffering the latest figures on a suite in which I had expressed a moment's interest. See, here's its sales history, its current assessment. Would I like to see it in 15 minutes? She would be wearing such a brave smile that I could only admire her and never find it in my heart to turn her away.

11 Meanwhile, my friends, who were older and therefore wealthier, were actually buying places. I went to a friend's housewarming party with a smile of congratulations on my face and envy in my heart. My former foster parent bought a penthouse with 12-foot ceilings in a new building; another friend purchased an actual house with the help of his well-off parents. I went to a cocktail party at his parents' home, where a hundred guests fit neatly into the kitchen. I was surrounded by half-a-dozen empty bedrooms, Jacuzzis and soaker tubs and murderous chandeliers in the marble foyer. Resentment blazed in me.

12 Now when I walked the streets of Vancouver, I glared up at the high windows of the condominiums and felt the owners were not as special as me, nor as deserving. When I gave poetry readings, I looked out at the audience and wondered how many of them owned their own homes. It came to me that I had rarely wanted anything this much before.

13 One afternoon Laura took me to the opening of a converted building where she said the suites were priced below market value. Balloons were tied to the gates and hedges, and dozens of would-be buyers stood about the grounds, gazing up at the suites with their brochures shielding their eyes.

14 The display suite was bustling with activity — realtors wearing suits and flustered smiles, the women with green eye shadow and trailing a scent of White Shoulders. They paced back and forth with their clients, pulling out calculators to demonstrate price per square foot and the amount of monthly payments. Even as I sat there, someone called out that suite 312 had just been sold and 105 down the hall and they were expecting an offer on 210.

15 The cell phones rang and rang and the anxiety of the buyers became a frenzy of panic. It was a fever that sparked smiles on the faces of the realtors. Offers were recklessly written, and a slim-waisted woman in a floral dress who represented the financing company stepped forward to give or withhold her approval.

16 I was tempted by the display suite, which was small but fully renovated, boasting a marble fireplace and slate tiles. Loden wallpaper in the bathroom was printed with female Greek statues clutching scraps of fabric to their breasts. I realized that the suite was a good bargain, but as I sat on the rented leather couch I found I could not pull out my chequebook and write an offer, not without at least a night's reflection.

17 "In all good conscience, I can say you aren't going to lose money on this one," Laura said, but I was immobilized with terror. An hour later she drove me home. I spent the evening drinking heavily and calculating my finances.

18      The suite was priced within my range and by the light of morning  
I had decided I would make my move. I went back to the suite where  
I had sat on the couch and looked around my new home — this was  
where I would put my desk, my bed. I approached the sales agent — a  
beefy, blond man with a distracted air and an incessantly warbling pager  
— and said I would buy the display suite.

19      “Oh. That was sold yesterday,” the man said, already turning away.

20      I surprised myself with my own reaction — it was grief. I very nearly  
heard the crack of my heart breaking. This was not the relief I felt when  
one of my previous offers had fallen through; this was my *home* being  
taken away.

21      I stumbled out in a daze and walked the three kilometres home,  
wiping away tears with the back of my hand the whole way. It seemed  
my song would be a different one after all, it would be the song of  
Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Autumn Day*: “Whoever has no house now will  
never have one.” It was all very well for Rilke — he had owned houses.  
He had written his famous elegies while staying in Princess Marie von  
Thurn und Taxis-Hohenloe’s castle. I wished bankruptcy, illness and  
death upon whoever had bought my suite.

22      What surprised me for weeks afterward was how entirely alike this  
feeling of bereftness was to losing the person you love. Somehow, the  
real, intelligent, sensible desire to buy a first home and stop paying rent  
had mutated over the months into an obsession that was like a woman’s  
obsession for a man who had deserted her, whom she could love only at  
a distance.

23      When I slept I was tortured by dreams in which I walked through  
beautiful apartments that were within my price range, then just as  
I pulled out my chequebook I would wake up. Several times I dreamed  
I bought an apartment with three balcony doors but no balconies, and  
I knew that one day I would open the doors, step out and fall to my  
death. In another, I had just moved into a new condominium and  
discovered that with the removal of the previous owner’s furniture and  
pictures, I could see that the walls were pocked with holes the size of  
my fist.

24      Over the course of a year, my realtor and I saw 50 suites, I sat on 50  
strangers’ sofas, looked into their cupboards, sniffed inside their refrig-  
erators, inspected their drapes and light switches. I checked the drains  
in their balconies and flushed their toilets. I looked for my own books  
on their bookshelves and was dismayed by the rows of American  
bestsellers or educational texts I found there. I peered into their closets  
and discovered if the owners were people who shopped in vintage stores  
or Sears or Holt Renfrew.

25      Once I saw the apartment of a little old lady whose obsession was  
turtles — troops of ceramic, glass and jade turtles filed across every  
available counter and desktop. She owned an aquarium of turtles, post-  
ers of turtles, a bedspread with a turtle stitched on it.

26      After 12 months of searching, I no longer believed I would purchase  
anything soon. I had visions of my realtor and me setting out at the  
turn of the millennium to look at our 300th suite.

27      When at last I found the right place, it happened so suddenly that  
the frustrations of the year vanished overnight. I went to an open house  
on Sunday and on the Monday Laura presented my offer. It was ac-  
cepted that afternoon. She stopped by to give me the news and when  
she came down the hallway her eyes were shining.

28      “You have a home now,” she said.

29      The rest of the week flashed by in a blur of telephone calls and  
meetings with the bank manager. I signed contracts, read bylaws and  
city council meeting minutes and certified deposit cheques. It was so  
stressful that I felt disconnected from reality. I vacillated between hap-  
piness, numb panic and a great, swelling pride. I had never been in  
debt for anything before, had never even owned a car or a computer,  
and now here I was committing myself to a \$100,000 mortgage for 650  
square feet. I had made a decision that was going to affect the rest of  
my life.

30      I take possession of the suite at the end of June, just days before my  
24th birthday. I may never sleep again. But at last I am a homeowner.



**Explorations:**

Evelyn Lau,  
*Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*  
*Other Women* (novel)  
*In the House of Slaves* (poems)  
*Inside Out—Reflections on a Life So Far* (memoir)  
[http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/HUM/ENGL/canada/poet/e\\_lau.htm](http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/HUM/ENGL/canada/poet/e_lau.htm)  
<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/EvelynLau.html>

**Structure:**

1. Lau presents her process analysis as a *narrative*, in almost pure chronological order. Identify at least ten words or phrases of TRANSITION (often at the beginnings of paragraphs) that speed us along. Is Lau’s organizational choice a good one for her topic of buying real estate?
2. You’ve just read how Evelyn Lau found and bought her new home. Is her *process analysis* detailed enough that you could now do the same? Or is it more informational than directional? Is it both?
3. In paragraph 22 does Lau go too far in equating a deserted lover with a renter yearning for property? Or has the emotion of her essay risen to the point where this *comparison* works?

### Style:

1. Has Lau reached the recommended 50% or higher level of *example* content? In which paragraphs does she offer especially vivid ANECDOTES and SENSE IMAGES? If you didn't know, might you guess from this essay that she also writes poetry and fiction?
2. In paragraph 23 Lau uses the device of dreams to portray her own state of mind. How effective is this passage?
3. Read paragraph 24 aloud in class. Where do you hear repetition? Does it come across as an error of style, or as a deliberate technique? What effect does it have?

### Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. In paragraphs 3, 12 and 24, Lau hints at the economic perils of her own career as writer. And if you have read her autobiography *Run-away: Diary of a Street Kid*, you know the insecurities of the life she had escaped not long before writing this essay. Do these facts explain the strength of her desire to own a home? Or does everyone want to be an owner? Do you? What are your own future plans for shelter?
2. In the 80s Canadian real estate prices shot up, then in the early 90s fell by about a third. As of this writing, houses and apartments are rising in value again. Is buying a house or apartment still a good investment? Or is it now more of a lifestyle decision?
3. Lau vividly portrays her real estate agent Laura Cavanagh at work. Now using this example, summarize to the class, in a verbal *process analysis*, how a good agent helps her or his client to find and purchase a property.
4. Are there advantages to renting? Name them. Are there disadvantages? Name them.
5. Lau states that she "had never even owned a car or a computer" (par. 29), yet was now signing a \$100,000 mortgage. Is your attitude towards ownership more like that of Lau *before* or *after* her decision to buy real estate? What are your own economic goals as you look into your future?
6. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Think about the time you selected and bought one of the following: a computer, a motorcycle, a used car, or a new car. Fill a page with brainstorming. Now look over what you have produced, circle or highlight the best items, and arrange them in a short outline. Do you have all the steps of the process you performed? Are they in time order? Do plentiful and exact details — without intimidating jargon — make the directions useful to your AUDIENCE? Or if not, are there enough ANECDOTES and examples to make your informational process analysis entertaining? Now write a quick first draft. The next day look it over. Has it reached the 50% level of example content? Have you, like Lau, sped your reader on with*

TRANSITIONS? Does the whole process like hers, rise at the end to a CLIMAX? Edit for these things, then finally for spelling and punctuation, before you print out your best version.

Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.

# 'I'm Putting You on Pause'

In a short autobiography posted in 2002 on the Edmonton Journal Web site, Paula Simons related these facts: She was born and raised in Edmonton, then earned an Honours B.A. in English Literature at the University of Alberta, and an M.A. in Communication from Stanford in California. After a graduate fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, in Florida, it was "time to pay off my student loans." So in 1987 she went to work as reporter and editor at Alberta Report magazine. Two years later she joined CBC Radio as a producer, working in Edmonton and Toronto on a variety of shows, including Open House, Ideas, and The Arts Tonight. In 1995 Simons returned to Edmonton to become a senior writer at the Edmonton Journal. Her work has appeared in many magazines, including Brick, Western Living, Saturday Night and Reader's Digest. In 1992 she won a Maclean-Hunter Fellowship in Arts Journalism, at the Banff Centre for the Arts, and in 2000 was shortlisted for a National Newspaper Award. Simons is married and a mother, and, she says, "a passionate and proud Edmontonian." Our selection investigates her longtime interest in the media. It appeared on December 10, 2000 in the Edmonton Journal, then was reprinted the next day by the National Post.

1 "Mummy, can I put you on mute?"

This, from a not-quite-four-year-old, tired of listening to me talk to other adults, instead of to her.

2 "Sweetie," I answer, "your Daddy's been looking for my mute button for 15 years. No one's found it yet."

3 The adults around us laugh, to my daughter's annoyance. She hadn't been making a joke. It's not that she thinks I'm a TV: She's pretty clear on the difference between people and machines. It's just that she's a child of this mass media age, and plenty of the metaphors that frame her life come from the media world.

4 "Mummy, I'm putting you on pause."

5 We're in her bedroom, reading *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, when she decides she needs a drink of water. She wants me to freeze the action, just as we pause her video or her CD when she needs to run to the bathroom or get a snack.

6 "Rewind the world!" she cries, when she drops her ice cream cone. She longs to control the flow of time, the way she controls the flow of video tape. Why, she asks, can't we replay and relive a moment of our lives, the way we can replay and rewatch a favourite scene from *Mary Poppins*?

I ration television pretty strictly in our house. My daughter didn't watch at all until she was more than two. Now she's limited to educational shows on non-commercial channels, for just a few hours a week. We read, we fingerpaint, we bake cookies, we go to the museum. But yes, we also watch TV. And what fascinates me, is how differently the children of today consume TV.

8 When I was growing up, we watched TV passively, our viewing patterns dictated by the rigid TV schedule. You watched *Mr. Dressup* on weekday mornings. You watched *Wonderful World of Disney* on Sunday night. There weren't 75 channels. There were three, or later, if you were lucky, seven. You watched the same shows as your friends, at the same time and pace. Movies you watched once, when they were released in theatres. And you watched them in real time: no interruptions, no repetitions.

9 Today's kids are far more sophisticated media consumers.

10 They know, from a remarkably early age, that they're not hostage to a TV schedule. They know that shows can be taped and replayed for their convenience. Today's preschoolers are already adept editors.

11 "Fast forward through this part. It's too scary for me," says my daughter. "Rewind, rewind, I want to see that part again."

12 Each time she watches a movie on tape, she reworks the story to suit her tastes, her mood. For her, a movie is not a static, received narrative. It's a dynamic, interactive experience, one she controls.

13 She has her own custom-tailored version of *Pinnocchio*, her unique interpretation of *The Sound of Music*. (Forget the Anschluss. We just watch Fraulein Maria and the kiddies sing. Over and over and over again.)

14 For today's kids, a movie just isn't something to watch only once, on the big screen, from start to finish. Now movies come home on video, to be watched again and again, at leisure. Forget narrative arc. Forget the director's intentionality. Kids watch movies in snippets, repeating their favourite parts, putting the tape on pause when something else catches their attention, fast-forwarding through the boring bits. The power is in their hands.

15 At the same time, the media universe has fractured into a thousand choices. Kids are replacing TV with new media options: computer games, CD-ROMs, the Internet.

16 But the TV universe itself is also fragmented. If you're even remotely close to my age, and you grew up in Canada, you grew up with *Mr. Dressup*, *The Friendly Giant*, and later, *Sesame Street*. We all watched the same shows, because they were the only ones to watch. They gave us a shared vocabulary, a shared set of pop cult icons, a shared sense of community. Today, there are dozens of high-quality Canadian kids' shows, produced by companies like Cinar and Nelvana, plus dozens more imported from the United States, Britain, Europe, Japan. That means kids today are often watching different things.

17 My daughter's favourite show is *Pirates*, a gentle, funny program, on the Treehouse channel, about a brother and sister living out their pirate fantasies, in a world "long, long ago, before parents were invented." But you won't find *Pirates* merchandise in stores. And few parents I talk to have even heard of it. In this multichannel universe, kids' TV shows aren't "broadcast" to a single audience community. Our children, bombarded by choice, create their own, individualized, TV viewing experiences.

18 Some days I'd like to "rewind the world," and stuff the TV genie back in its bottle. But parents can't pause technology by remote control. We can't mute the media din. Our job must be to teach our children to be savvy, critical media consumers. New technologies have already given them a control over their media experience that we never dreamed of. Now we must show them they needn't be mass media thralls. They have the power. They have the freedom. The stories they choose to hear, the stories they choose to tell, can be their own.

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Explorations:

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*  
<http://www.media-awareness.ca/>  
<http://cbc4kids.ca/getset/>

Structure:

1. Simons begins by quoting her daughter: "Mummy, can I put you on mute?" Does this opening draw your attention? Does it lead into Simons's topic? More METAPHORS follow, portraying people in media terms. Point them all out. Are there enough media metaphors to serve as an organizing device for the argument?
2. Are all these METAPHORS used intensively enough that together they constitute an ANALOGY of person and machine?
3. Identify Simons's THESIS STATEMENT.
4. Simons's argument is a *comparison and contrast* so strong that it could have gone into that chapter of this book, had we not chosen this essay to illustrate use of metaphor. Review the introduction to "Comparison and Contrast" on pp. 158–161. Next, thinking of Simons's thesis statement about "how differently the children of today consume TV" (par. 7), identify which paragraphs of her argument show how her own generation watched TV, and which paragraphs show how today's children "consume" it. Does she develop her *contrast* by "halves" or by "separate points"?

Style:

1. How FORMAL or INFORMAL is the style of this essay? Who seems to be its intended AUDIENCE?

Ideas for Discussion and Writing:

1. Simons "rations" her daughter's TV watching (par. 7). When you were little, was your TV rationed? Or were you free to watch anything at any time? Which approach is better? Why? If you have children, will you ration TV or not?
2. Global ChildNet reports that "American children and adolescents spend 22–28 hours per week viewing television — more than any other activity except sleeping." It also calculates that "by the time today's children reach age 70, they will have spent 7 to 10 years of their lives watching television." How much did you watch as a child? How much do you watch now? What is the right amount, and why?
3. When Simons was little she watched programs like *Mr. Dressup*, *The Friendly Giant* and *Sesame Street*. What were your own favourite children's shows? Describe one of them. What programs are most watched today by young children you know? How are they different from the ones you watched? Give examples.
4. Simons writes that today's children are mastering the use of media so that "the stories they choose to hear, the stories they choose to tell, can be their own." Do you share her optimism? Or will such media savvy just lead kids to pass over the unpleasant and real things, such as the *Anschluss* (Hitler's Nazis marching in to take Austria) while "Fraulein Maria and the kiddies" sing on (par. 14)?
5. **PROCESS IN WRITING:** *Switching from TV and VCR media, think now of surfing on the Internet. (Note that "surfing," itself, is a METAPHOR, like the many metaphors Simons uses in her essay.) Think a while, then fill a page with more metaphors that express your experience of using the Internet. These may be either figures of speech you have already heard, or new ones you are making up. Now try out a few possible THESIS STATEMENTS to sum up the overall meaning of these metaphors, and choose the one that seems best. Next write a quick discovery draft developing your thesis statement, and using your metaphors wherever they fit well. The next day polish and revise, then bring the essay to read aloud in class.*

*Note: See also the Topics for Writing at the end of this chapter.*